

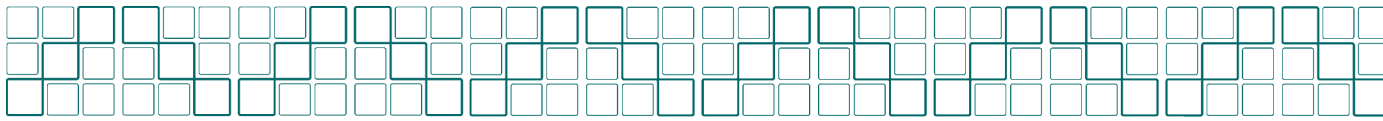
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# Picking the Graduate Program That is Perfect for You

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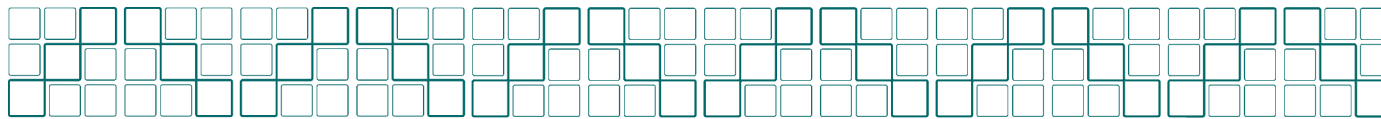


NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH



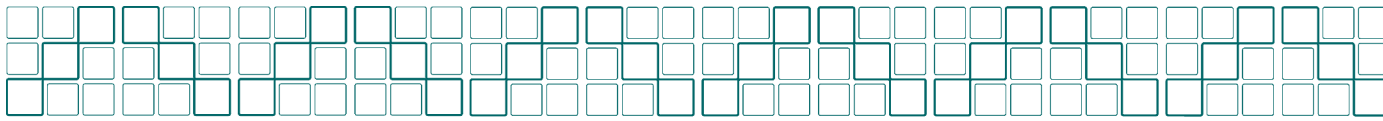
# First Questions

- Why do I want to go to grad school?
- Where do I see myself in the future?
- What kind of graduate experience will I need to reach these goals?



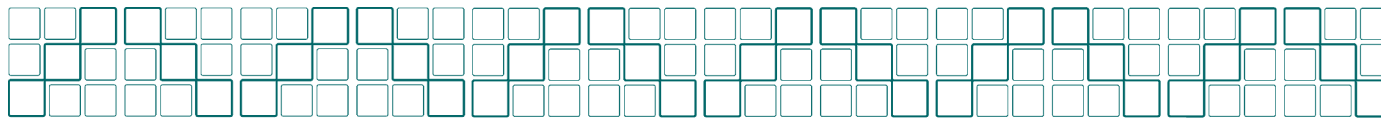
# What Type of Program

- Ph.D. and other doctoral programs
  - Interdisciplinary, umbrella or department-based
- MD/PhD
  - MSTP or non-MSTP
- MPH
  - With a variety of sub-disciplines
  - See <http://www.whatispublichealth.org/faqs/index.html> for information on careers and educational opportunities



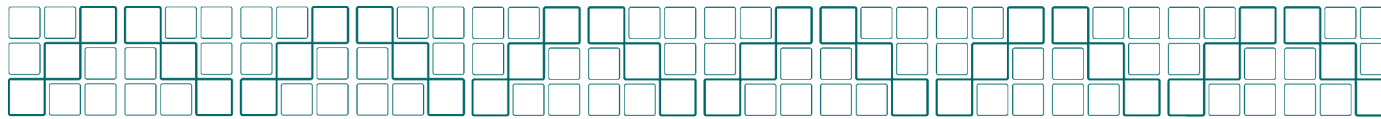
# Am I Ready?

- Academic preparation
- Research skills
- Problem solving skills
- Ability to read and comprehend research papers
- Communication skills - verbal and written
- Time & stress management skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Maturity & willingness to sacrifice
- Finances



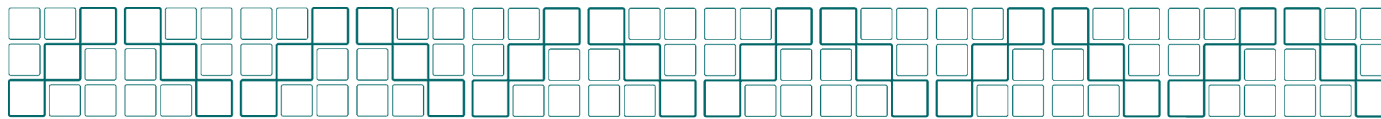
# Taking Time To Get Ready

- Do a research-oriented postbac
  - At the NIH (NIH POSTBAC IRTA PROGRAM)
  - At a University (NIGMS PREP Programs)
- Work as a technician
  - Be sure that your boss will support your scientific and professional development
  - Consider working somewhere you might like to go to school
- Take appropriate classes
  - Choices depend on your undergraduate record
  - Classes without solid research won't be as useful



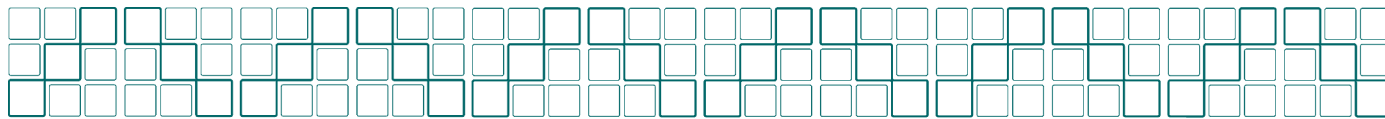
# Things To Consider (I)

- Program focus on teaching and mentoring of graduate students
  - Coordinated programs to help you develop professional skills
  - Strong leadership and oversight of your graduate experience
  - Attention to controlling time to degree
- Structure of the program
  - Stipends and fellowships
  - Rotations
  - Required coursework
  - Qualify exams
  - Teaching requirements
- Teaching opportunities and pedagogy training



## Things To Consider (II)

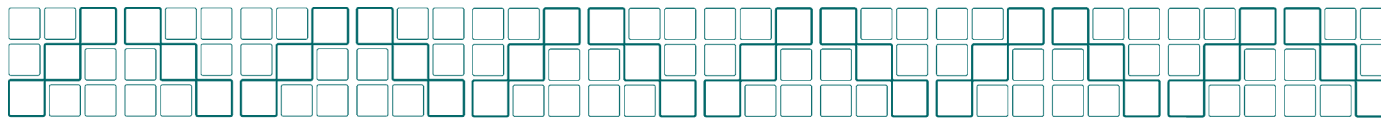
- Availability of career services and other job training opportunities
  - Should be clearly advertised on their website
- Program climate, morale, and student satisfaction
  - Best explored in person
- Diversity of the students, faculty, and broader communities
- Career goals and outcomes of past and current students
- Geography and cost of living
  - Distance from family
  - Needs of partner and kids
  - Access to things you enjoy



# Evaluating the Quality of the Department & Institution

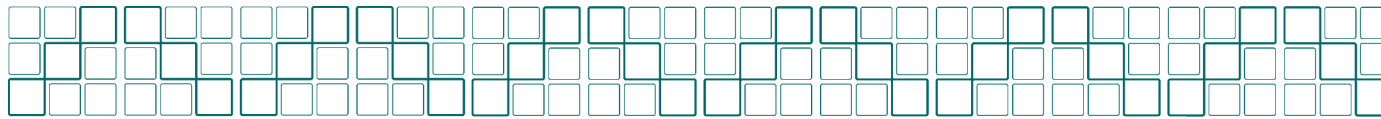
- Funding record
  - RO1 <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/r01.htm>
  - Training grants to the institution & individual students
- Publication record
  - Quality, not just numbers
  - Students doing the writing & publishing as 1st author
- Awards
  - Both faculty & students
- Pay attention to ratio of senior to junior faculty





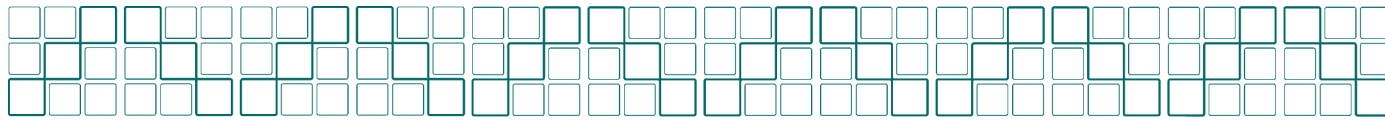
# Drilling Down To Your Scientific Interests

- Scientific resources
  - Quality of the research space
  - Core facilities
  - Access to important patient populations
  - Possibility of doing fieldwork
  - Access to experts in technologies important to you
- The number of potential mentors doing what YOU want to do?
  - You will want to know about their funding, publication record, tenure status, **and** mentoring history
  - Remember Institutions and Departments have strengths in some research areas and not in others



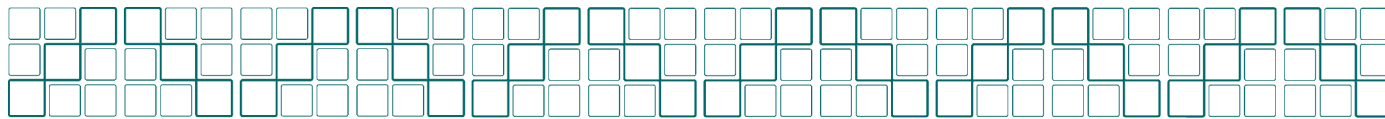
# To Learn About Schools and Programs

- Talk with your mentors
- Use the NIH alumni database
- Surf the web
- Go to undergraduate meetings
- Contact program directors, administrators and students at schools that catch your interest
- Arrange a visit if possible (but only if you go prepared)
- Do NOT use US News & World Reports rankings



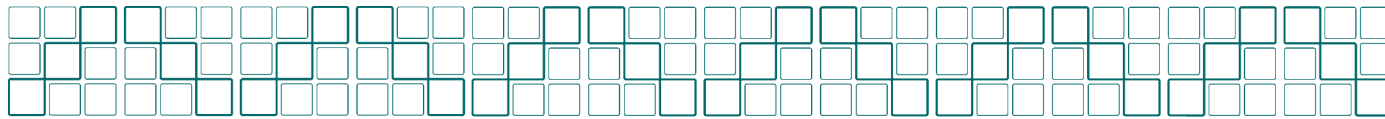
# People You May Communicate With

- Director of Graduate Studies or Director of Recruiting
- Program Administrators
- Individual Faculty
- Students in the program



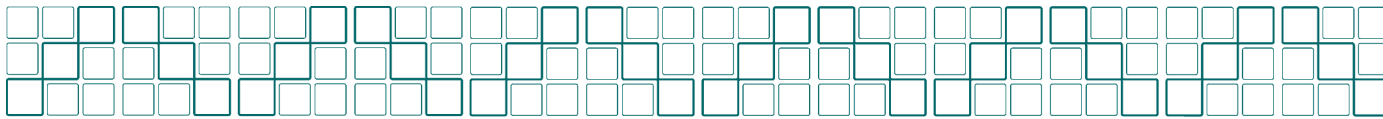
# To Prepare a Strong Application, Ask:

- Why am I special, unique, and impressive?
- What tangible experiences have I had to prepare for a career in this field?
- What experiences tell me I will be successful in this career?
- What personal characteristics do I possess that will improve my prospects for success in the field?
- What are my career goals?
- Have I overcome any obstacles in my life?
- How will I explain any gaps in my training or blemishes on my record?
- Why this school and program?



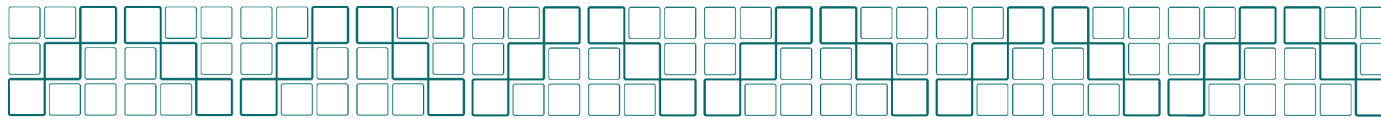
# The Admissions Committee

- 5 - 15 members depending on the size of the program
- Chaired by Program Director or a Director of Admissions
- Applications are read in advance and discussed at a meeting
- Some, but not all, use rolling admissions
- Program Directors often have some discretion



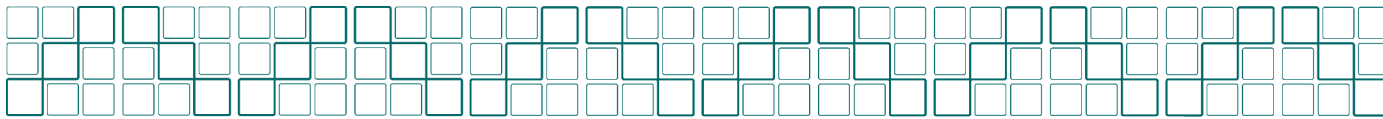
# What We Evaluate

- Academic record
- Standardized test scores
- Research experience
- Research statement
- Recommendation letters



# Letters of Recommendations

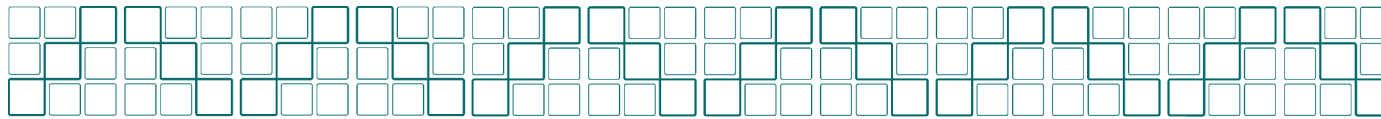
- Three - four are required
- Typically submitted on-line
- From mentors and teachers who **KNOW YOU WELL**
  - not from personal/family friends
  - Not from non-educational employers unless the work is highly relevant
- Asking:
  - Far in advance
  - Provide a list of schools who will be contacting them and the program you are applying to
  - Provide an updated CV



# Consider

- The goal of your written application is to get an interview - even if you have good grades, take this step seriously
- Missing deadlines and asking for an extension is a poor way to make a good impression
- You can apply to too many OR too few schools
- Get advice along the way
- You should have a mix of reach schools and safe schools
- Waiting until the last minutes adds tremendous stress to an already stressful process

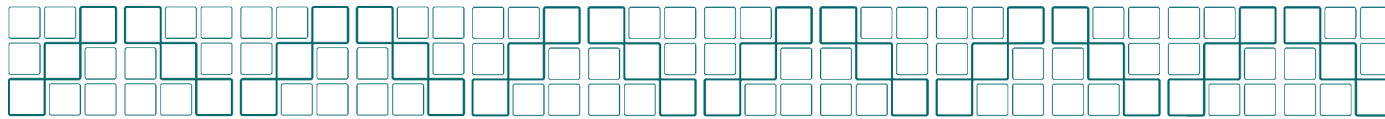




Good luck!

Workshop/Seminar / Graduate School  
**Writing Personal Statements for**  
**Graduate School**

Building 50, Room 1227, Oct 05, 2010  
12:00 pm - 1:30 pm



Want to Talk?

Email [wardb@od.nih.gov](mailto:wardb@od.nih.gov)

Subject Line: GRAD SCHOOL